**Here comes the Rain again**

Exactly fifteen years after the world première in De Munt, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's dance company Rosas revisits the successful production *Rain*,set to music by Steve Reich, with an entirely new cast of ten dancers. *Rain* stands out because of the breathtakingly formalistic and technical refinement of its choreography yet, at the same time, rides a wave of emotion.

**This production is rife with memories and now also new emotions. What does this creation mean to you?**

**Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker:** First and foremost it's a party. *Drumming*, *Rain*'s twin sister, was this way too. They are both performances set to music by the same composer, two important works by Steve Reich, *Drumming* and *Music for 18 Musicians*. They both offer a great flow of music that lasts an hour and extends an explicit invitation to come dance. *Drumming* was inspired by African percussion music whereas in *Music for 18 Musicians* Reich ventured into a harmonic-emotional field for the first time. The latter is a combination of the purely pulsating that is characteristic of his minimal music and the rhythmic polyphony from his early years, with a harmonic evolution in composition. The piece itself starts with eleven chords that mark the harmonic framework for the entire piece.

And for the first time, he also works with small moments of suspense embodied in his musicians' breathing. The clarinetist's breathing cycle also acts as a compositional starting point for the strings. While in *Drumming* you get clean and clear breaks, here you get waves. This results in an entirely different energy field which solicits a different kind of dance. Still, both *Drumming* and *Rain* are group dances in which the individual lines of the dancers remain clearly articulated. It is still a case of dancing to the point of exhaustion but it is not the marathon that characterises *Fase* (1982) or *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983). The script is much too voluptuous for that. It is a completely different kind of minimalism compared to *Fase* or *Rosas danst Rosas*, which creations are based on very small cells that are continuously repeated with an enormous physical intensity. It's as though the dancers' bodies are thrown against a wall of structure. In *Rain*, the initial vocabulary consists of one long female and one long male phrase carried out by seven women and three men. A multitude of choreographic processes cause this basic formula to fan out into an exuberant and a contrapuntally very layered spatial script with, on the one hand, spiralling, circular movements and, on the other, very clear straight lines and diagonals running through that counterpoint like a kind of knitting machine. The long duration may cause an element of exhaustion, yet it remains jubilant. There is no trace of that combative Amazon aspect that can be found in, for instance, *Rosas danst Rosas*.

**There is also common ground with other Rosas creations from that same period.**

**De Keersmaeker:** There is a shared secret narrative that lies beneath the surface. In the same way *Drumming* was connected to the text performance *Just Before*, *Rain* is connected to *In Real Time*, which we made with tg STAN and Aka Moon. The final words of that piece were *I hope it is not going to rain tomorrow*.

*Rain* is, in addition to being inspired by the song by Madonna, a quote from Macbeth and a poem by Paul Van Ostaijen, also the title of a novel by the New Zealander Kirsty Gunn. Gerardjan Rijnders wrote the text for *In Real Time* based on the conversations we had with the whole group and based on texts and material that was brought forward. The novel was one of them. In one chapter of that book, the female protagonist tries to save her little brother's life after he drowned, which is conveyed as a very technical and anatomical description of how such resuscitation takes place. What is beautiful about this is that within that very technical description lies an extremely emotional sense of sadness and of loss.

**Apparently you only had two months to rehearse for *Rain* at the time.**

**De Keersmaeker:** We made an exceptional transfer of choreographic material written for *In Real Time* to music by Aka Moon, inspired by music by Reich. That basic vocabulary was rewritten and extended for what you could refer to as the dance version of *In Real Time*. It is important to know that *Rain* was made with practically the same group of people than *Drumming* (the dancers were Cynthia Loemij, Roberto Oliván de la Iglesia, Martin Kilvády, Alix Eynaudi, Ursula Robb, Fumiyo Ikeda, Iris Bouche, Rosalba Torres, Bruce Campbell, Oliver Koch, Marta Coronado and Taka Shamoto). At that time, we were working with a permanent company in residence at De Munt / La Monnaie. We were on the same track together and that group element is evident.

Also, the dancers immediately showed great enthusiasm for using Reich's music and to jump into that flow together and dance it. The music had previously been sitting in my drawer since I made *Fase* but I didn't feel ready then to start writing choreographies to these kinds of scores. But ultimately, there aren't that many scores in contemporary music that have at once the length and the character that make it attractive to dance. There are longer pieces from the early twentieth century, but they are often disruptive to the unifying principles of music like time, regularity and harmony. More so than Philip Glass or Michael Nyman, I believe Reich is the leading figure of minimal music in the period after the Second World War and, in this key composition, he combines notions of structural rigour, length, presence of pulse and harmonic evolution.

***Rain* also signified a renewed collaboration with couturier Dries Van Noten and scenographer Jan Versweyveld. They provided an iconic décor and ditto costumes in a subtly evolving spectral colour palette.**

**De Keersmaeker:** For *Drumming*, I told Dries that I thought orange would be a good choice for the dominant colour tone of the costumes – because it was the final colour in an evolution of shades that characterised *Just Before*. For *Rain* I had something with rainbow colours in mind, but I didn't want to make it too new age either. I had a shell in the form of a spiral on the table in front of me and it had very beautiful hues ranging from skin colour to beige to pink. And as is always the case with Dries and Jan: if you ask for orange, you will get orange and if you want pink, that's what you'll get. In *Rain* it ranges from skin colour to pale pink and from deep pink to intense magenta, followed by a fade-away to what is more akin to autumn colours: a silvery grey, beige and white. The entire performance is really a rising wave that discharges in a circular celebration of the golden ratio (the intersection of a divide in which the greatest of the two parts relates to the smallest as the sum of the two parts relates to the greatest) and then subsides again. Like the memory of an intense experience.

**One of the secrets of *Rain* does indeed seem to be the way emotions whirl up from a sophisticated structure. How do you stay in control of such an intangible process?**

**De Keersmaeker:** Form is never a goal in and of itself. A Gothic cathedral also has a sophisticated design but its ultimate goal is that you experience it with a kind of self-evident admiration and allow yourself to be swept away by it. This choreography is also about creating a continuous stream by which people can allow themselves to be swept away without necessarily understanding the construction.

**An example of that hidden emotional effect of a formal procedure is this golden ratio, a ratio that is used in both space (the visual arts) and time (in music), both of which are shown in this choreography.**

**De Keersmaeker:** What is nice about the golden ratio is that it is an asymmetric ratio. If something is in perfect balance, it stays still. If something is asymmetric, there is a tension that leads to change. Then there is more of the one than there is of the other and there is a possibility that the ratio will change or that the bigger part will push away or strengthen the smaller.

**Did you push the choreographic composition for *Rain* farther than before?**

**De Keersmaeker:** I probably did in terms of the complexity of the patterns, the counterpoint and the control over a group that dances together. *Rain* is about the convergence of things. The vocabulary is also more virtuoso than the material of *Fase* or *Rosas*, which lies closer to more recognisable human movements.

**How difficult is the piece for the dancers?**

**De Keersmaeker:** It is physically very demanding, also because much of the work is on the vertical axis. There are many moments when you are lying on the ground, are lifted up and then dropped again. All these techniques, so typical for the 1960s, that relate to floor work and are so different from classical ballet are present. It is *the art of falling and rising*.

The piece also demands a great deal from the dancers because of the immediacy, the physical intensity and the precise surrender that are necessary to interpret the roles. To be able to carry out this cumulative autonomous script and structure on the stage, you have to be on top of things. But if that utter concentration spills over to the audience, you get a beautiful collective experience.

**What did you pay attention to when putting the new cast together?**

**De Keersmaeker:** Of course there are various aspects. It requires quite a bit of technique and focus. But you also want to have a nice group. It is a search for unity in diversity. In a way, you also keep the original interpreters somewhere in the back of your mind, although you don't want clones either. For the male roles, however, there are two casts that alternate from one day to the next.

**There was no live music at the première, but that was added later with Ictus performing.**

**De Keersmaeker:** And then that jubilant and exuberant character of the whole creation truly comes into its own. Ictus plays the piece brilliantly, so once again, we will be able to experience the pure joy of the combination of dance and music.

Interview realised by Michaël Bellon